



MDOC Walk a Mile Offender Mentoring Program

The Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) is developing a parolee mentoring program, pursuant to the 2019-2022 Strategic Plan, Goal 7, Objective 7.1 – “Establish a Mentoring Program for Parolees”:

Mentors provide offenders with the opportunity to change, encourage them during difficult times, model positive behavior and help develop pro-social and problem-solving skills. The Department is committed to providing mentorship to parolees returning home, who are lacking this critical support system. To better align with evidence-based principles around mentorship, Field Operations Administration (FOA) will develop a plan to accomplish this objective.

Once the program has been solidified, the intention is eventually to also include probationers. However, for the pilot we are going to focus on mentoring relationships for parolees. Key points regarding the mentoring program include:

- The target date to launch the *Walk a Mile* returning citizen mentoring program is June, 2023.
- The pilot of the mentoring program will be launched *statewide* and not limited to select offices.
- Participation in the mentoring program will be 100% *voluntary* for both our clients (Mentees) and for Mentors. Mentors will not be paid or compensated and nothing about our clients’ participation (or lack thereof) will be punitive. We would prefer that all clients be matched with Mentors, but we will not mandate their participation. If our clients choose not to participate, or begin participating and later decide to stop participating, that will not be held against them.
- The focus of mentoring program will be the *peer mentoring concept*. To the extent possible, we want Mentors to be persons who have the shared/lived experience of incarceration and reentry, have turned their lives around, are now on the ‘right track’, and would be good prosocial role models. However, we will also actively recruit Mentors from community service organizations, volunteer groups, faith-based organizations, and individual community members.
- Mentor training will be administered via online modules, self-paced, and will include topics such as boundary setting, avoiding manipulation, Motivational Interviewing, trauma-informed care, communication skills, community resources and social services, etc.

- Most mentoring relationships will be one-to-one. However, we will support group mentoring where necessary and if practical.
- We are procuring a mentoring software platform (MentorcliQ) that will build a profile for both Mentors and Mentees with customized criteria. It contains an algorithm that will recommend Mentor/Mentee matches based upon the individual profiles and a short personality assessment. However, all matches will be completed manually by the Mentor Coordinator with input from the Mentee's case agent.
- Mentors will have the opportunity to provide exclusion criteria (i.e., they may opt to not be matched with a Mentee who is a sex offender, who has a history of SUD, etc.)
- Successful mentoring relationships are predicated upon two key factors – trust and confidentiality. To that end, what is discussed between Mentors and Mentees (clients) will be considered largely confidential.
- The main objectives of the mentoring program ('quantitative measures') will be to reduce recidivism, reduce abscond rates, reduce technical violations, and reduce drug/alcohol use and/or relapse. Secondary goals ('qualitative measures') will include increasing Mentees' overall optimism, outlook on life, and confidence in completing their parole program.
- We will partner with MSU, who will conduct a program analysis for the pilot. They will need a minimum of 150 clients to participate in the pilot for a minimum of six months to do a quality analysis and to be able to show statistical significance regarding meeting program goals.
- Mentors, Mentees and Agents will be surveyed periodically to ascertain their level of satisfaction with the mentoring program, gage satisfaction, and elicit suggestions for improvement.

There is a tremendous amount of data and literature proving the benefits of mentoring in education, for professional development, for youths, and for juvenile offenders. It is very reasonable to expect that mentoring will provide similar benefits to the returning citizen population. In addition to offering another resource to assist our clients, the success of this program has the potential to position the MDOC as a national leader in adult returning citizen mentoring and inspire other states to follow our lead.

If you have any questions, concerns, suggestions, or would like to know how you may contribute to the success of the *Walk a Mile* program please do not hesitate to contact:

Tony Mills, Mentor Coordinator

(517) 230-2670

millsa13@Michigan.gov

MDOC-walkamile@michigan.gov